3: Hart E-5 (1928-1929) 1930 OI20 Tiwi OI20

has no other white inhabitants, while Melville is held under lease by the meat firm known as Vesteys Ltd., but has no permanent white inhabitants, though occasionally campers, beachcombers, and hunters from Darwin stay there for a few months.

All the earlier accounts lay stress on the ferocity and hostility of the natives of these islands, but long albeit intermittent contact with the whites has tamed them. At the present time it is no exaggeration to say that except for the Larakia, who are almost extinct, no tribe in the Northern Territory has so assimilated white ideas or is so familiar with white men. A proof of this is afforded by the fact that members of this tribe are more in demand in Darwin as houseboys than members of any other tribe, simply because, as it is generally expressed, they have more "savvy," that is they are more intelligent and more adaptable to white conditions.

But while their proximity to Darwin and their long experience of white men have taught them much of our ideas and customs, the absence of a permanent white settlement in their country with its consequent massacres and epidemics has on the other hand prevented their numbers being depleted and their social organization being broken down. It is therefore still possible to obtain fairly full and satisfactory information about the life and culture of these islands as they were before white influence began.

The ferocity of these people, I am convinced, has been much exaggerated even by the earliest settlers. As a matter of fact their outstanding characteristic is not their fierceness but their sense of humour, as noted by Spencer. They are constantly laughing, even at the most solemn moments, and this applies to practically every man, woman and child on the island. I am inclined to think that their superior physique, which is very apparent, their huge spears—which incidentally they seldom use, except ceremonially—their striking method of painting their faces and their years of conflict with the Malays, which had accustomed them to stand and fight rather than to run at sight of a stranger, gained them in large part their evil reputation.

In physical appearance they are certainly Australoid, but the men are on the whole taller, sturdier and better proportioned than any of the mainland tribes. This is obvious even in Darwin, where it is an easy matter to pick out almost at a glance a member of the Tiwi. I agree also with Sir Baldwin Spencer that they are superior to the mainlanders,

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not only in physique but also in intelligence. I should be surprised to find in any other Australian tribe a man with the intelligence and adaptability of my own head boy Mariano.

The flora and fauna of the two islands is very similar to that of the rest of the Northern Territory. The country is mostly flat with a low range of rocky hills between Cape Gambier and Cape Keith on Melville Island, and a still lower range in the centre of Bathurst. The timber consists of the usual Australian trees; gums, stringy-bark, woolly-butt, bloodwood and ironwood cover most of the two islands, broken here and there by patches of open grassland and in other places by dense patches of jungle where snakes and "devils" thrive and the natives seldom enter. Wallabies are extraordinarily plentiful, but there are no kangaroos. Buffaloes are found on Melville in small numbers. These are the wild descendants of the domestic Indian buffaloes imported for agricultural purposes by the early settlers at Fort Dundas. At one time they had increased and multiplied to such effect that thousands were shot every year without any appreciable effect upon their numbers. At the present time, however, probably owing to many of the cows being killed, there are probably not more than a thousand on the island. The natives are seldom able to kill a buffalo though they realise the fact that it is good to eat.

Not only are wallabies plentiful, but there is also an abundant supply of the other native articles of food, fish, crocodile, birds of all kinds, wild honey, yams and other native vegetables. As a result of this abundance of foods, it would seem that the two islands had a greater density of population than is to be found in almost any other part of Australia.

LOCAL ORGANIZATION

The people inhabiting Melville and Bathurst Islands are subdivided into a number of local groups. These local groups are the important sections of the population since they act as land-owning groups, war-making groups, have a solidarity of their own which is far stronger than any tribal solidarity that may exist and even to some extent regulate marriage.

Before considering these hordes in detail, however, something must be said about the tribal name. All the hordes practise the same customs, speak the same language and inter-marry. The boundaries of the people speaking this language are of course strictly defined by the sea. In other words, the people of Melville and Bathurst have a solidarity of their own,